United Nations

Press Release

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Team from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to establish field offices along Iraqi border with Turkey and Iran to help refugees return to Iraq.

- Iraq asks United Nations to assume responsibility for relief camps established by United States and other foreign troops in northern part of country.

- Special Committee against Apartheid deplores decision by European Community to lift certain sanctions against South Africa.

- UNICEF Executive Board hears calls for need to follow-up on Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at 1990 World Summit for Children.

- Speakers in Disarmament Commission cite Gulf crisis as evidence of need for regional approaches to arms control.

- Office of United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator reports on earthquake in Costa Rica.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced today that it would send an advance team to Baghdad this week to establish field offices in areas of refugee outflow along the Turkish and Iranian frontiers.

The agency said in a communique that the team of 10 to 15 international experts would be deployed throughout Iraq as a result of last week's agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Iraq. It said the field offices would work to ensure the "personal safety and the provision of humanitarian assistance and relief" for all Iraqi refugees and displaced people who voluntarily want to return to their homes.

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The UNHCR said that so far it had received almost $43 million of the $238.5 million needed to fund its emergency operations in Iran and Turkey. It said an additional $38 million would be needed to fund aid operations within Iraq.

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Iraq has asked the United Nations to assume responsibility for relief centres which are being set up for refugees in the northern part of the country by United States armed forces and other foreign troops.

In a letter, dated 21 April, to the Secretary-General dated 21 April, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Ahmed Hussein, said now that an agreement had been reached between the United Nations and Iraq on the establishment of humanitarian centres throughout the country to assist in the care and repatriation of refugees, the allied camps were no longer necessary or justified. He said the presence of United States and other foreign forces on Iraqi soil was a violation of national sovereignty.

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The Special Committee against Apartheid has deplored the decision of the European Community to lift a number of sanctions against South Africa.

In a statement issued yesterday by the Chairman, Ibrahim Gambari of Nigeria, the Special Committee said the decision was counter-productive at this stage of developments, because as of yet the conditions for negotiations had not been established, and agreement had not been reached on the mechanisms for the preparation of a new constitution. In addition, it said, many political prisoners were still in jail and political exiles had not yet been permitted to return without restrictions.

The Committee appealed to all Governments to maintain existing measures until the changes in South Africa were profound and irreversible.

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The Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) began its annual session yesterday, hearing speakers stress the need to follow-up on the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the 1990 World Summit for Children.

The Board is considering UNICEF's proposed budget of almost $395 million for 1992-1993, as well as programme recommendations for countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas, totalling some $1,360 billion.

The session was opened by the Chairman of the Board, Lisbet Palme of Sweden, who stressed that in order to improve the plight of children in Africa, UNICEF would have to overcome multiple scourges of apartheid, war,

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poverty and environmental degradation. She said the World Summit's solid commitment to give higher priority to children's concerns could only be achieved through greater resolve at all political levels.

UNICEF's Executive Director, James P. Grant, cited the current tragedy in Iraq, stressing the Fund's continuing responsibility to respond to emergency situations. He outlined his agency's accomplishments in the past year, including the Summit, and the progress made towards achieving universal child immunization.

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The Disarmament Commission, which began a three-week session yesterday, has heard several speakers cite the recent conflict in the Gulf as highlighting the need for regional approaches to arms control as well as for efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction.

Regional and international security were closely interrelated, speakers said. Many said that distinctions between bilateral and multilateral disarmament could no longer be sustained, nor could the distinction between disarmament and questions of international security.

Delegates also urged support for transparency in military matters -- activities as well as capabilities. They said effective collection and dissemination of relevant military information were vital to disarmament.

In addition, speakers called for renewed efforts aimed at nuclear disarmament, the development of treaties on nuclear-weapons testing and chemical weapons, and the reduction of conventional military spending in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

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The Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) reported today that a powerful earthquake had hit Costa Rica and northern Panama yesterday, killing so far some 20 to 30 people.

The agency said the quake occurred about 70 miles south-east of San Jose, Costa Rica's capital city, causing severe damage to housing. It said the largest hospital in the Atlantic port city of Limon had been evacuated. The UNDRO has arranged for the dispatch of a team to the area, and an international appeal for assistance is under way.

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